

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 SSM-03 IO-13 /076 W
-----126184 230719Z/11

O R 221618Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1413

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION SINAI
USCINCEUR

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: LABOR PARTY BEGINS TO CRITICIZE GOVERNMENT

1. SUMMARY: THE LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP SHARPLY ATTACKED THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT AND OF RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. IN A SERIES OF SPEECHES AT A PARTY SYMPOSIUM ON FEBRUARY 16. RABIN WAS IN PARTICULARLY SHARP FORM AND ACCUSED BEGIN OF "OUTMODED CONCEPTS OF POLISH HONOR," WHILE PERES SAID THE GOVERNMENT HAD CONTRIBUTED TO EROSION OF AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL. AT A LATER MEETING OF THE PARTY'S EXECUTIVE BUREAU, PERES SAID THE PARTY WOULD BEGIN TO

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TO SPEAK OUT MORE. THESE STATEMENTS PROBABLY WERE PARTIALLY AN EFFORT TO RESTORE PARTY UNITY. WHILE IT IS UNUSUAL TO SEE RABIN AND PERES CRITICIZING BEGIN RATHER THAN EACH OTHER, THE UNITY IS MORE APPARENT THAN REAL. THE SHARPER ATTACK ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES PROBABLY DOES NOT CONSTITUTE THE START OF A UNIFIED CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY

2. THE LABOR PARTY APPEARS TO HAVE SHARPENED ITS ATTACK ON THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. UNTIL NOW VARIOUS PARTY FIGURES HAVE LIMITED THEMSELVES TO QUESTIONING THE WISDOM OF CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PEACE PROPOSALS AND PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S TACTICS IN HIS DEALINGS WITH SADAT AND THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. BUT SPEECHES BY PARTY LEADERS AT A LABOR SYMPOSIUM ON FEBRUARY 16 AND AN ANNOUNCEMENT BY PARTY CHAIRMAN SHIMON PERES AT A MEETING OF THE PARTY EXECUTIVE ON FEBRUARY 19 APPEARED TO INDICATE THAT THE PARTY LEADERSHIP INTENDS TO ARTICULATE A UNIFIED PARTY STAND AND A COMPREHENSIVE AND CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE NEGOTIATING POSITIONS AND UNDERLYING CONCEPTIONS OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT.

3. AT THE SYMPOSIUM, LABOR LEADERS RABIN, PERES AND EBAN DELIVERED SPEECHES SHARPLY CRITICAL OF PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. FORMER PRIME MINISTER RABIN DERIDED BEGIN'S "OUTDATED CONCEPTS OF POLISH HONOR (WHICH) DO NOT HOLD IN POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS." HE ASSERTED THAT BEGIN HAD CONDUCTED THE NEGOTIATIONS BACKWARD BY PRESENTING HIS FINAL PLANS AT THE OUTSET AND DEMANDING THAT THEY BE ACCEPTED OR NO NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE POSSIBLE. IF THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE FROM SADAT, HE ASKED, HOW CAN BEGIN CLAIM IT TO BE

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HIS RIGHT? RABIN WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE SINAI PROPOSAL WAS BASICALLY FLAWED. THE OFFER OF TOTAL WITHDRAWAL AND COMPLETE EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY IS "THE ROGERS PLAN MINUS;" AT LEAST UNDER THE ROGERS FORMULA ISRAELI PRESENCE WAS ASSURED AT SHARM-EL-SHEIKH. "I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL THOUGHT THAY ANYONE COULD BUY THIS IDEA," RABIN SAID, REFERRING TO BEGIN'S PROPOSAL TO RETAIN ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI UNDER EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY. THE ATTEMPTS TO SUPPORT ISRAELI CLAIMS BY REFERRING TO INTERNATIONAL LAW ARE CHILDISH AND ARE NOT APPLICABLE TO SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS AMONG NATIONS, RABIN DECLARED.

4. THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER ALSO CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT FOR UNDERMINING ISRAEL'S CREDIBILITY IN A WAY THAT NO OTHER ISRELI GOVERNMENT HAS DONE IN THE PAST, BY ENGAGING IN SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY DURING NEGOTIATIONS. "ISRAELI HONOR HAS NOT BEEN ENHANCED IN AMERICAN EYES FOLLOWING THIS REIDCULOUS SIBTERFUGE. HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO RESPECT A GOVERNMENT THAT ENGAGES IN SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY UNDER BOTH SECURITY AND AREHEOLOGICAL GUISES?" REGARDING RELATIONS WITH

THE U.S., RABIN ASSERTED THAT IF BEGIN WOULD HAVE BOTHERED TO ACQUAINT HIMSELF WITH THE NUANCES OF AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC LANGUAGE, HE COULD HAVE PREVENTED SOME OF THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS WHICH OCCURRED. "IF BEGIN TAKES PRIDE IN AMERICAN SUPPORT IT SHOULD NOT COME AS A SURPRISE THAT SADAT WOULD WANT TO ACHIEVE WITH CARTER EXACTLY WHAT BEGIN THOUGHT HE GOT. IT IS AN ILLUSION TO EXPECT A NEUTRAL (AMERICAN) POSITION. THE U.S. HAS INTERESTS. ONE MUST VERIFY WHAT IS SAID WITH THEM AND NOT GLORY IN ACCOMPLISHMENTS NOT YET ACHIEVED NOR BE SURPRISED WHEN THERE IS UNDERSTANDING ALSO WITH THE OTHER SIDE."

5. PERES ALSO ATTACKED THE GOVERNMENT'S SETTLEMENT
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POLICY, PARTICULARLY THE TIMING OF THE RAFAH SETTLEMENT INITIATIVE. HE DECLARED THAT PRIME MINISTER BEGIN HAD SUGARCOATED THE REALITY OF THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR MONTHS AND IN SO DOING DAMAGED SADAT'S POSITION. UNBRIDLED GOVERNMENT OPTIMISM ALSO LED TO THE SERIES OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS WHICH HAS ERODED AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE ISRAELI POSITION. PERES WARNED THAT THE PARTY MUST ADOPT POSITIONS BASED ON NATIONAL AS OPPOSED TO PARTISAN EVALUATIONS. THE CARTER FORMULA FOR THE WEST BANK, PERES SAID, COULD SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HER ARAB NEIGHBORS. "IF WE WERE IN POWER WE COULD CONSTRUCT AN AGREEMENT BASED ON IT." OTHER SPEAKERS, INCLUDING ABBA EBAN AND FORMER DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SHLOMO AVINERI, ALSO CRITICIZED IN HARSH TERMS BEGIN'S HANDLING OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. AVINERI FOLLOWED UP PIS REMARKKUWITH A HARD-HITTING JERUSALEM POST ARTICLE AND A LENGTHY RADIO INTERVIEW.

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INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 SSM-03 /076 W

-----126596 230719Z /21

O R 221618Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1414

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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6. RABIN ELABORATED ON THE ABOVE REMARKS IN A LENGTHY CONVERSATION WITH THE DCM ON FEBRUARY 18. HE UNEQUIVOCALLY STATED THAT IN HIS MIND AND IN THE VIEW OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, THE WITHDRAWAL PROVISIONS OF RESOLUTION 242 HAD APPLIED TO ALL THREE FRONTS.

HE EMPHATICALLY DISMISSED BEGIN'S STRATEGY OF OFFERING RETURN OF ALL OF THE SINAI AT THE ONSET OF NEGOTIATIONS, A TACTIC WHICH DEMONSTRATED NO UNDERSTANDING OF ARAB PSYCHOLOGY. WHILE NOT FORTHCOMING ON HOW TO RESOLVE THE QUESTION OF THE RAFAH SETTLEMENTS, RABIN IMPLIED THAT HE WOULD NOT BE NECESSARILY AVERSE TO AN OFFER OF TERRITORIAL EXCHANGE. RABIN IS NOT IDEOLOGICALLY HUNG UP OVER THE SETTLEMENT QUESTION AND IN HIS VIEW

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THE AIR BASE ISSUE, WHILE IMPORTANT FOR SECURITY REASONS, COULD BE RESOLVED BY RETAINING AT LEAST THE ETZION AIRFIELD FOR AN UNSPECIFIED PERIOD.

7. REGARDING THE WEST BANK, RABIN ARGUES THAT ISRAEL SHOULD BE MORE ACTIVE IN ENTICING HUSSEIN INTO THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND SHOULD NOT TOTALLY RELY ON AMERICAN EFFORTS. RABIN TAKES A RATHER SANGUINE VIEW OF THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF ARMS SALES TO EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA, RECALLING THAT DR. KISSINGER HAD LONG AGO FOREWARNED THAT AN EVENTUAL U.S.-EGYPTIAN ARMS RELATIONSHIP WAS THE INEVITABLE PRICE THAT WOULD HAVE TO BE PAID FOR WEANING SADAT AWAY FROM THE SOVIETS. EGYPTIAN F5S ARE CLEARLY NOT A THREAT TO ISRAELI SECURITY AND IT WILL BE YEARS

BEFORE SAUDI ARABIA CAN PUT ITS F15S TO EFFECTIVE USE. THE ISRAELI PUBLIC, IN RABIN'S VIEW, IS NOT YET WILLING TO GIVE UP ITS HOPES FOR PEACE, BUT IN THE ABSENCE OF LEADERSHIP A REVERSION TO THE SEIGE MENTALITY WHICH PREVAILED BEFORE SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM CAN BE EXPECTED. ONLY FIRM AND HONEST LEADERSHIP CAN AVERT THIS. RABIN ASSERTS THAT PERES IS EAGER TO ENTER A NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT. THIS, IN HIS VIEW, WOULD MAKE NO POLITICAL SENSE NOR WOULD IT APPRECIABLY AUGMENT LABOR INFLUENCE ON GOVERNMENT POLICY.

8. COMMENT: RABIN WAS UNUSUALLY VOLUBLE AND GAVE THE UMPRESSION OF SOMEONE WHO HAS COME TO TERMS WITH THE FACT THAT HE PROBABLY WILL NOT REGAIN THE PREMIERSHIP AND HAS THEREFORE DECIDED TO FILL THE ROLE OF A FORTHRIGHT AND VOCAL ANALYST, UNINHIBITED BY POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. END COMMENT

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9. IN HIS STATEMENT AT THE MEETING OF THE LABOR PARTY EXECUTIVE ON FEBRUARY 19, PERES ANNOUNCED THAT HENCEFORTH LABOR WOULD SPEAK OUT PUBLICLY ON THE ISSUES OF THE DAY. PERES DECLARED THAT A COMPROMISE CAN BE REACHED BETWEEN THE OPENING POSITION OF EGYPT AND THAT OF THE ALIGNMENT, WHEREAS THE LIKUD CLAIM TO A SOVERIEGNTY OVER JUDEA AND SAMARIA PRECLUDES ANY AGREEMENT ON THE WEST BANK. A PEACE SETTLEMENT IN EGYPT, HE EMPHASIZED, IS POSSIBLE; A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE AIR FIELDS AND SETTLEMENTS IN SINAI CAN BE VOUND.

10. COMMENT: FROM THESE STATEMENTS IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE LABOR PARTY HAS CONCLUDED THAT THE TIME IS NOW RIPE FOR ASSUMING THE KIND OF OPPOSITION ROLE WHICH IT HAD BEEN UNABLE TO UNWILLING TO ADOPT PREVIOUSLY FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS: THE BEGIN PEACE PLAN CAUGHT EVERYONE BY SURPRISE AND, WHILE LABOR WAS OPPOSED TO CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSALS, IT WAS INHIBITED FROM MOUNTING AN EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION BECAUSE IT FEARED DOING ANYTHING WHICH MIGHT IN ANY WAS DIMINISH CHANCES FOR PEACE. TACTICALLY IT FELT IT WOULD NOT AFFORD TO TAKE A NEGATIVE STANCE AT A TIME WHEN THE PROSPECT OF PEACE HAD SO CAPTURED THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION. IN ADDITION, IT HAS TAKEN SEVERAL MONTHS FOR THE PARTY TO DEVELOP A UNIFIED POSITION ON THE BASIC ISSUES. NOW THAT NEGOTIATIONS APPEAR TO BE TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED, THE ARGUMENT THAT LABOR SHOULD REFRAIN FROM CRITISMIS IS LESS VALID. THE PARTY HAS DETERMINED THAT IT CANNOT BE SERIOUSLY HARMED BY

MOUNTING A CAMPAIGN OF VOCAL OPPOSITION. THE FOUR LEADING FIGURES IN THE PARTY (PRERS, RABIN, ALON AND EBAN) ARE IN FULL AGREEMENT THAT: 1. THERE IS NO CHANCE FOR AN AGREEMNT WITHEGYPT WITHOUT A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE ON THE WEST BANK; 2. HUSSEIN MUST BE GIVEN MORE COMPELLING REASONS TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS; CONFIDENTIAL

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AND 3. THE BEGIN PLAN FOR EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI IS A NON-STARTER.

11. OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH SEVERAL PARTY MEMBERS AND JOURNALISTS LEAD US TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THESE RECENT STATEMENTS DO NOT CONSTITUTE A CONCERTED LABOR PARTY CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT ON FOREIGN POLICY NOR DO THEY INDICATE A RENEWED SENSE OF PARTY UNITY, ALTHOUGH ELEMENTS OF EACH OF THESE FACTORS EXIST: THEY ARE A DEMONSTRATION OF A UNITY OF SORTS; THERE HAD BEEN SOME CONCERN BEFORE THE SYMPOSIUM THAT RABIN WOULD ATTACK PERES RATHER THAN BEGIN AND THERE WAS RELIEF IN THE PARTY THAT A COMMON TARGET WAS HIT. THEY ALSO SHOW THAT LABOR IS NOT MORE PREPARED THAN IT WAS IN THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS TO ATTACK BEGIN ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. THE IMPETUS FOR SUCH CRITICISM MAY STEM FROM THE PERES/SADAT MEEGING AND THE CONVICTION ARISING FROM THAT MEETING THAT IF LABOR WERE IN POWER, IT WOULD DO A BETTER JOB OF NEGOTIATING. WE WOULD ANTICIPATE THAT LABOR WILL STILL REFRAIN FROM ANY KIND OF ORGANIZED CAMPAIGN UNTIL AFTER BEGIN RETURNS FROM WASHINGTON.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LAND SETTLEMENT, POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY LEADERS, SPEECHES, PEACE PLANS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 feb 1978
Decapton Date: 01 jan 1960
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TELAV02438
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780083-0670
Format: TEL
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3514126
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LABOR PARTY BEGINS TO CRITICIZE GOVERNMENT
TAGS: PINT, PBOR, IS
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/92799ed1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014